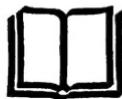


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A COLLECTION OF
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P R A Y E R S

by

JOSEPH FERGUSON KING, PH.D., D.D.



Minister of

THE FIRST CHURCH IN OBERLIN

1942 - 1962

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O THOU WHO AT THE BEGINNING brooded over the world and said, "Let there be light," brood over us in Congregation, and lift up the light of thy countenance upon us, and grant us thy blessing.

As we commit to thee the opening of this year and the new chapter in our lives, we remember with gratitude every good influence which has played upon our lives. For the love which brought us into the world and prayed for us and with us, for the influence of friends and teachers and all who shared with us their faith and aspirations, their struggles and their hopes, for those who have bequeathed to us this place and its history; for those who have gone before us in our Christian history and in these halls, for all the saints who from their labors rest, we give thee Lord, our trembling thanks, but most of all for him who is the way, the truth and the life, and in whom thine own vastest purposes have their yea, hear again our praise and adoration.

We commit unto thee not only the holiest aspirations of this moment, but the undramatic labor and work of the days and months ahead, the tedious tasks, the moments in which faith slackens and the vision fades. Thy will be done in us, in things large and small, let thy judgment and thy mercy seek us in all the crevices of our being and pierce through the layers of self-will and blindness. It may be that we do not know what we ask, but we dare not ask for less. So we commend to thee ourselves, each other and this community, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

O THOU WHO HAST FASHIONED out of thy timelessness another day and renewed unto us the gift of life, we lift to thee our morning prayer, in praise and adoration. The days of our years are like specks upon the sea of time, yet they are the stuff of which our souls and destinies are made. To use them aright, to find within them thy forgiveness and thy guidance, we offer back our days and our lives as a morning sacrifice to thee who saveth us from destruction and futility.

Our wants are many but our needs are few. Meet, O Lord, not our wants but our needs. Forbid that we should equate our complacency with thy patience or our impatience with thy righteousness. Penetrate with thy sharp word our disguises and deceits, our blindness and insensitivity, our insincerities and our special disobedience, until thy spirit works its saving way in us.

Before thee we remember our public dangers and our private sorrows, the divisions between nations and the estrangements between men, the pain of the world's bodies and the sorrow of human hearts. All this we commend to thee with the lives of us here gathered.

But hear too, O Lord, our gratitude for the daily blessings of our lives: friends new and old, the experiences which renew and enlarge our minds, our share of safety and of health and the chance to work and play and grow.

O thou, who carries in thy heart the laughter of the world as well as its sorrows, its hopes and its despair, its poetry and music as well as its sighing, make both light and shadow, life and death, to be pathways unto thyself.

O THOU WHO ART GREATER than our greatest thought of thee, in whose sight a day is as a thousand years and a thousand years as a day, we who are earth-bound and earth-conditioned yet who live by both memory and hope, lift our hearts in prayer to thee and call thy name in faith and expectation.

Our impulse is to pray that thou wouldst take us from where we are to where thou art, but in Christ we are asked to believe that thou dost reveal thyself and come to men, not in some ideal realm removed from their daily lot, but amidst the dirt and dust, the brokenness and darkness of our daily existence. That thou, the holy God, can be known of unholy men in the midst of our sin is the miracle we need and we pray "work it again, in our midst, now."

Yet not even our darkness can altogether stifle the cry of gladness and thanksgiving for all that makes life good. For the love which we have known, for the friendship that blesses and heals, for the chance line of poetry, of music, the sight of turning tree and bush, the smile of a little child, the repose of an aged face — for all that breaks the shell of habit and prompts us to wonder, we give thee, Lord, our grateful thanks.

O "give us not to think alone of things so far away" as next year or next decade: keep us in the Eternal Now. Teach us that life will never have more or less of problems than now, never more of gladness or sorrow than now; that today is the day of salvation, the day to be and decide and to love.

As we come into thy presence we bring in our hearts not only those we love, but those too, perchance, we hate; we bring not only those to whom we are close, but those too from whom we may be estranged. In thy presence we are one: one in our sin and need of forgiveness, one in our need of light and help which thou alone canst give.

O Thou whose patience the long centuries have not broken, and in whom faith and hope are eternally renewed, touch our lives with thine own faith and hope and keep us trustfully open to the heights and the depths of life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

O THOU WHO ART SEEN of no human eye, and who canst not be represented by any form or color, yet in whose image we are made so that our mystery is hid in thy mystery, we worship thee in humble awe and simple need.

As always when we pray, gratitude and regret mingle in our hearts. We are grateful for the song that steals upon our lips, for the recollection of faces known and loved but now vanished from our sight, for sight of stars at night, the remembered sight of pine-trees growing out of seeming solid rock, unbroken by the winter's cold and wind. We remember with thankfulness to thee the daily faithfulness of sun and moon, our share of food and rest and shelter. Still more, we give thee thanks for faithful love, for truth to know, the gift of liberty, but above all for him who spoke as never man spoke before or since and who is still the way, the truth and the life.

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But our sins are ever before us and the disordered life of our time presses in upon us. We remember those for whom daily experience is dark with danger, heavy with disappointment, and so confused that their hearts do not sing. Even if we could, by beseeching thee, lift the burdens of the world, we are not sure we should. The dangers and the glories of life may be so deeply intertwined that they cannot be separated — at least by us. So we pray for ourselves — for those we know and love and for all whose need is like unto our own — not for ease but for courage, not for freedom from problems but for an inner plenitude of spirit and for the sense of thy unseen companionship.

NOT OUT OF DULL HABIT or blind custom do we gather here, O God, but in response to an immemorial wistfulness and heartfelt longing, seeking to discern who and what thou art and who and what we are; seeking light upon our path, forgiveness for our sins, and seeking to make, if only for a moment, our wills at one with thine and our lives at rest in the patience of thy love.

If some of us come to this moment with a sense of failure, keep us from self-defense and evasiveness and create in us such openness of soul that we may learn from and grow under both the bitter and the sweet. If we come to this moment with pride in our own achievement, break thou the crust of our lives and humble us with the recollection of him in whose name we gather and with some sense of the unseen cloud of witnesses who served thee with greatness of heart. And if we come to this moment dull and unresponsive in spirit, lift up our eyes to the high hills of both memory and hope.

We bless thee for the promise made of old that thou wilt no more destroy the world; that while earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter shall not cease; and that thou hast placed the rainbow in the sky as a sign of thy promise. Help us therefore to live not as children of complacency or of impatience but as those who know the urgency of thy judgment and the patience of thy love.

May our meeting together, seeking what no one of us can find alone, be a priestly meeting — bearing to each of us reconciliation, acceptance, mercy and forgiveness. It may be that we know not how great a thing we ask, but we dare not seek for less — in the name of Jesus Christ.

O GOD, SEEN OF NO HUMAN EYE, heard of no human ear, yet whom our hearts seek and our tongues praise: the heavens are telling thy wonders, and firmament sheweth thy handiwork. Great art thou and greatly to be praised.

Yet words of praise do not always burden our lips; sometimes it is a cry of rebellion, sometimes the word of piteous complaint or petty ambition and personal desire. Sometimes too, our dull and unresponsive minds prompt no words at all. O God, whose property it is always to be merciful, whose spirit the years and centuries do not weary, whose hope and faith not even our sin can break, to thee we turn knowing that in thee as in nothing else is the true center of our lives.

In these moments we bring to thee not only our unfulfilled aspirations, but our deep fears and interior hurts — the hurts we have given and the hurts we have received. In thy presence we would see ourselves as we are and through the miracle of thy acceptance of us we would be led to be more nearly what, by thy spirit, we have the power to become.

In these moments, too, we bring our concern for those who stand where life is hard, perplexing, lonely, isolated. Teach us when to speak and when to remain silent, when to lift and pull, and when to let go and rest back on a wisdom greater than our own. Bless to us our common grouping in home and family, in work and play, in church and school, in community and nation. And we forget not our responsibilities in a world so rich in power and so poor in skill to use that power for the common good.

*O God our help in ages past,
Our hope in years to come,
Be Thou our guard while life shall last,
And our eternal home!*

O GOD, FROM WHOM TO TURN AWAY IS TO FALL, toward whom to turn is to rise, and in whom to continue is to abide: we know that if we forget thee, thou dost not forget us; and we know that we cannot forget for long, for thy image is so deeply embedded within us that we remember thee, if only with a gnawing hunger and wistful longing. So we turn toward thee in whom, as in nothing else, we live and move and have our being.

As morning sun and light come back once more with morning bird and flower each in its place, make us glad with creature gladness: glad in the beauty and marvel of the world; glad in our work; glad in the things of the spirit and the fellowship of kindred minds; glad in music, prayer and worship; troubled only by our own shortcomings, and that this world, which might be fair, is so fearful and strife-ridden. Redeem the world: begin it with us, O Lord; our crooked purposes, our blundering minds and tongues, and set us to work with all who love, in the service of all who suffer.

Bless to us both our sorrows and our joys, the times of ease and the times of toil. Grant us humility of mind, so that when the mind reaches mysteries it cannot penetrate, it may share its sovereignty with faith and hope and love. In the strange power and alchemy of thy love may all things work together for good, for the growth of our souls and the growth of thy kingdom.

ETERNAL GOD, WHOSE LOVE AND MERCY have touched us all, and from whose judgment we would not escape, we lift to thee our prayers as morning sacrifice and call thy name in faith and expectation. The week now gone is lost, and, like water spilled upon the ground, cannot be gathered back again. Stay thou the evil we have done and dared to call it good. Our light is so often darkness and we need thee most when we know it least.

Release us, O Lord, from the grip of fears and anxieties which cripple our spirits. Take from us the sense of frustration and insecurity which irritate us into vanity, self-assertion and aggressiveness. Melt down our cold hearts and make them responsive to whatever of light and holy impulse this day may hold. And do thou, the great physician, touch with healing the deep hurts of our hearts.

Through the turmoil of the possibilities of both good and evil in which we continually live, grant us clarity of mind to perceive, the strength of will to follow and the skill of heart to execute the thing thou callest us to do. And amidst the weight of care and the burden of responsibility, grant us some experience of the peace which passeth understanding.

As we bow in prayer our hearts are awakened to thankful amazement for all that makes life good. If some men have hurt us, remind us, O Lord, of those who have blessed us and that we too have hurt. If we see the sources of evil in the world, remind us of those forces of goodness which are too gentle to proclaim themselves. To them may we give firm loyalty, and by thy grace, enable us to work to heal the brokenness, relieve the pain, and restore the wholeness of our common life.

O GOD, BY WHOSE PROVIDENCE we are here, by whose strength we are upheld, and in whose mystery the mystery of our lives is held, before thee we wait with hope and pray in faith.

A thousand years are but as yesterday in thy sight, yet our little days are the stuff of which our destinies are made, and we come seeking some light on their meaning, some wisdom to use them aright, some forgiveness that will redeem and reconcile the past, some encounter that will give them shape and purpose. O God, our wants are many but our needs are few. Speak to us where our need is greatest.

For the traveling sun that never leaves us long and after every night brings back the light of day for every man and beast in every place; for the varied year, the balancing of sun and rain, the summer's heat, the winter's cold, hear again our praise and thanks. The good earth is thy creation and our home, but alas! we have so often and so much misused it. Yet it is still the right place for love, for heroism and adventure. We would receive its goodness with gratitude, its beauties with joy and reverence; endure with courage its distortions, and know amidst its incompletions and its mortality an immortal gladness and a peace that passeth understanding.

To thy steadfast mercy and the healing arts of medicine we commend all who are sick. To those who walk through the valley of deep shadows, to the lonely and bereft, be thou the unseen companion; to the tempted and the confused, the God of hope; and with us all do as and what thou wilt, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

AS WE COME TO THIS PLACE and moment of prayer, we know that the defences and disguises which we erect against others are of no avail against thee, O God. Thou seest us as we are, and better than we can see ourselves. We know a need which only thou canst meet. So we would stand open to thy healing and forgiveness, to thy judgment and correction, to thy blessing and renewing.

As one blade of grass doth signal the break of the longest winter, so one soul rooted in thee overcomes the power of darkness. Keep us, O God, from the easy answer; the genial tolerance that refuses to discriminate; the emotional aspiration that does not translate itself into living deed. Keep us, too, from the censorious judgment; the hard heart; the cherishing of anger until it becomes hatred; and so enable us both to give and to receive forgiveness and compassion.

We lift our prayer to thee for church and school, for college and community, and for nation and world. Beneath the cries of race and clan, within the tangle of the world's affairs, we recognize the sins of our own hearts and we confess that we are part and cause of the world's problem. Give us to hear, where we are, and at the deepest levels of our being, the words of truth which could redeem us and the time in which we live.

Grant to all who dwell in the strange land of sickness, sorrow and bereavement, both to hear and to sing, the songs of faith that they may, by thy grace, discover treasures hidden in the secret places of pain and suffering.

O GOD, WHO ART GREATER than our greatest thought of thee, and richer than our highest apprehension, yet into whose presence we can come if we come with a humble and a contrite heart, an honest hunger and some touch of wonder in our souls: in simple need and awe, we lift our hearts in prayer to thee.

We bring to thee the burden of our worst moments — the moments of temper, when we refused to understand, to forgive and to be compassionate. But we bring too, our best moments — the burden of dreaming more than we can realize. Thou hast placed within our hearts such deep desires that we can know at most only partial fulfillment. Continually we confront the conflict of good and evil not only in the world at large but in our own hearts. Continually we confront the mystery of existence and the mystery of both birth and death. Thy sea is so great and the ships of our understanding are so small!

Companion thou all the paths we walk, the easy and the difficult, the smooth and the rough. Grant unto us to tread the path and to run the race that is set before us, with some skill, if it may be, yet with patience, courage and perseverance, and with some growing mellowness and understanding of heart.

Increase amongst us, O God, men and women of sensitive conscience who seek, amidst the evils of our time, the reconstruction of their own lives and of the world. And to those who live on the lonely frontiers of science, medical research, social service, religion, and to those who hover between life and death of body and soul, be thou the unseen but real companion. Increase amongst us, too, men and women who, having seen the worst that life can bring, yet work and pray and hope and love.

Humbly we pray, seeking nothing for ourselves that we do not seek for all the sons of men.

O GOD, TO WHOM OUR PRAYERS ASCEND, and who dost hear us more truly than we can frame or utter our prayers; come to us now with thy forgiveness and thy power to renew and make whole.

Measure, measure unto us thy mercy, Lord, not according to our merit, but according to our need. For our merit is small, and our need is equalled only by the vastness of thy love and goodness. Work again thy miracle, the miracle of thy holiness meeting our sin, not unto despair, but unto peace.

Our lives are made into little worlds by the curtains of fear, anxiety and mistrust which we drop around ourselves. Surprise us by joy, awaken us with beauty, jar us with wonder until we are called back and up to thee and to our rightful selves.

Deliver us from a sense of futility, and make us glad to be alive, eager to accept the gift of life as a trust from thee, and open to any leading that may come to us. It may be that we know not what we ask, and mean not what we say, but we think we would be led by thy grace to so enter the lives of others that we may suffer with their sufferings and even die with their deaths.

Throw across our lives the imperatives of Jesus, and make us to confront the giant burden and agonies of our time, not only with a cleansing sense of our guilt for them, but with a deepening faith in thee and thy purposes which no evil can deflect.

Not alone for ourselves and those whom we love, do we pray, but for all, known or unknown to us, who stand where life is torn and hard-pressed. Touch with thy healing and thy love and hope, all the hard places of life.

ETERNAL GOD, WHO ALONE CAN RIGHTLY JUDGE and completely love, whose love alone is equal to the pathos of our human lives, as we lift our prayers and with our prayers, our hearts to thee, we would know thy unexhausted and the inexhaustible power to take from our lives the oppression of past failure and of present inadequacy and cleanse and strengthen us that we may both sense and serve the coming of new life.

As we bow together, dispel from us any coldness of heart lest by difference of estate or experience, narrowness of interest or inertia of spirit, we divide ourselves from one another and thus inhibit thy walking in our midst. If there is in our lives any truth, any light, any leading that we have been resisting, any resentment that we have been harboring, any fear which inhibits us, set us free, O Lord, set us free.

Grant that we may be so enfolded by thy love and thy claim upon us that our souls may be unbroken by any private fear or public danger. And, if in times of uncertainty, anxiety and confusion our hearts contract and our horizons narrow until we see only ourselves and our own interests, come thou upon us, O God, with that grace which for our blindness we cannot, and for our unworthiness we dare not, ask.

Hear our prayer for all sorts and conditions of men; those for whom the path is level and smooth; those for whom it winds uphill, and those for whom it descends into the valley of deep shadows. Be with us and all who cry unto thee, that we fear no evil save our own betrayal of thee.

For far-scattered groups of Christian brethren across this country and across this world, we pray. Heal the broken witness of the church; make it skillful to serve the cause of Christ with the dignity born of both courage and humility.

Receive, O Lord, our fumbling adoration and our wordless gratitude and hear still more the unspoken aspirations of our hearts.

As we stand upon the threshold of another day and begin the the living of another week that will never come again, we bow before thee within whose larger life and purposes our little lives are set.

We come to this place and moment in many different moods, yet each heart holds some regret, some unuttered fear, some unfulfilled hope and some disappointment. We seek no easy resolution of our problems, no escape from hardship and suffering and no release from struggle. But grant, O God, that in struggle, hardships and testing we may know an unconquerable joy, a faith that cannot be broken and a fidelity to that which remains and abides through the changing circumstances of our lives.

Save us, O Lord, from softness and sentimentality, from drift and aimlessness and from every false or unworthy ambition. Give us victory over our inner moods, magnanimity in the face of the irritations of life, and the capacity to create and accept the sterner self-denials which our prayers and aspiration demand.

Hear us as we pray for all the causes and organizations which seek the emancipation and enlargement of our common life. Keep us from weariness in well-doing. Widen our concern, deliver us from the allure of luxury, special privilege and special advantage, and deepen our capacity for understanding and compassion. May the spirit of Christ so possess us that we may discern the true from the false, the enduring from the transient and the authentic from the unauthentic!

O GOD, FOR WHOM EVERY FAMILY in heaven and earth is named, and who art in every place to bless and save: hear and receive us, as we gather in this place. Thy face is ever toward thy children: grant that as we turn toward thee, we may worship thee unto newness of life.

In thy presence, what we might be, convicts us of what we are. Thy mercies, remembered now, but so often unused and unappreciated, make us ashamed. Our easy lot, in the face of the world's suffering, troubles us. And we know ourselves to be people of shadowed purposes and unconsecrated deeds. Thy forgiveness, Lord, we need; and withhold not the guidance that would turn our feet into a better path.

We bless thee for both the ordinary and the extraordinary mercies of these days: for every act of love and kindness that comes to us, for each sight and sound of beauty, for the recollections of friends and guides from the past, and for every hope for the future that beckons us. For all that, amidst darkness and shadow, still shines and sings, we bless thee, O God, and praise thy name.

We commend unto thee the varying fortunes and several conditions of this congregation: the young, who face expanding horizons, who can know deep discouragement; the old, who face diminishing strength, but who remember sorrows endured and transcended; and those of the middle years, in whom eagerness has died, but repose has not yet been born. Fashion thy sufficiency to each, according to his need; and come to us all, in sunshine or in shadow, with thy power and thy love.

ETERNAL GOD, IN WHOSE PROVIDENCE WE LIVE, by whose wisdom we are guided, under whose judgment we stand, and by whose mercy we are forgiven, hear us as we lift our hearts to thee in prayer and seek in simple need, thy blessing.

We beseech thee — we pray, O God — not against thy reluctance but against our own — for though we seek thee with our lips, our hearts are often far from thee. Break thou through the hardness of our hearts, the coldness of our spirits, and the dimness of our souls. Break through our graceless ingratitude, our resentments and rebellion, break through our chilling disappointments and our numbing hurts, to give us not what we want, but what we need and ought to have.

Hover over us in congregation; play upon our lives, thou divine musician; lighten the dark places of our lives, thou light of the world; meet us at the point of our need; retrace thy image in us, and take us, if not to spiritual adequacy, at least to the point where we stand in faith and open to thy leading along the path ahead of us.

O Thou, who art the God of both life and death, we bless thee for all the saints who from their labors rest, for all who have gone before us and into whose inheritance we have entered. Enlighten and inspire our pilgrimage with the knowledge that we are not alone, nor the first to struggle through darkness and through doubt. O Thou, who groweth not old from age to age, but in and from whom life cometh forth continually new, create in us a new spirit and touch our lives with faith and hope, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

ETERNAL KEEPER OF THE YEARS, sovereign of both time and space, Lord of nations and father of our spirits, accept the praise and adoration of our hearts as bowing here we wait in faith and hope and expectation.

Thou sendest the alternate mercies of day and night, the varied seasons to minister to our varied needs. For the waiting wonder of the winter-time, the lingering twilight and longer night; our share of labor and of rest, of sorrow and of joy; the balancing of sunshine and of rain, we give thee Lord, our thanks and praise. For warmth of fire upon the hearth, the dancing shadows of candlelight, for the stars our fathers loved before us, the hand of kin and friend, we bless thy name. May love and beauty do thy work in us and lead us on to thee who art the author and the finisher of life.

Forgive the blindness of our right eye and the left, the fumbling of each hand, the wandering of our feet. Forgive our faithless fears, both real and unreal, each word of anger, our stubborn pride and our indifferent faith, and our failure to hear the tolling bell of suffering the world around. Redeem, O Lord, the evil we have done, and save us from its sorry repetition.

Through sound of carol on the morning air or late at night, through all the intimations of this Advent season, thou art awakening us to thankful amazement. May no weight of care, no shell of habit, no hardness of spirit make us insensitive to these passing days. Grant that that which shines in our minds and sings in our hearts may show forth in our deeds and actions. Throw across our lives the magnificent imperatives of Jesus, and as we confront the giant agony and evil of our world, grant that we may respond with some measure of his spirit in whose name we pray.



O GOD, IN WHOM WE LIVE and move and have our being even when we know it not, subdue our minds and soften our hearts as we bow together in prayer. Create in us that singleness of purpose which discerns thy truth, and that love which admits us into communion with thee and harmony with one another.

Thine O Lord, are the times we measure off by days and months, and though the years pass and the generations come and go, thy purposes abide and thy love fails not.

We look back now chiefly to give thanks and forward to take courage. Amid chance and change our sins have been forgiven, our wounds healed, and we have known a love greater than we deserve or merit. We do not ask to see the distant scene, one step enough, if with that step we know a light that never goes out and a presence that illumines our little days.

In this season, surrounded with family and friendly association, we remember all lonely folk. In this time of lightness and joy, we remember those who carry a burden of grief. In this time of peace, we remember those who are anxious, insecure and fearful. O God, in whose greatness and completeness there is both sorrow and joy, victory and disappointment, lift us into thy presence where whatever happens serves only to deepen our roots in those things that cannot be shaken.

O GOD, WHOSE WAYS ARE NOT OUR WAYS, whose thoughts are not our thoughts, yet who art the father of our spirits, whose love, Christ taught us, is never withdrawn, and whose mercy is without end, we turn to thee who art the source of life and the one in whom the mystery of our being and the meaning of our destiny, are hid. Call us back and up from our littleness and fragmentariness, and let the wholeness which is in thee restore us to our rightful selves.

We bring to thee the secrets of our hearts — those we hide from others, those hidden even from ourselves. We seek no miracle save the miracle of thy presence in our double-minded hearts. O Thou, who dost accept us even when we cannot accept ourselves, forgive and renew our lives. We bring to thee the burden of our responsibilities to home and family, to friends and vocation, to church and school and community, yea, and to the embattled and embittered time in which we live. How shall we play our part with earnestness and not compound the problems of the world with our own, or project into the tensions and hatred of the world our own tensions and hatreds? Teach us how and when to relax; when and how to take hold and how and when to let go. Keep us in glad obedience to our deepest vows and let us find, amidst struggle and strain, a peace we do not deserve yet deeply need.

Receive, O Lord, our grateful prayer for all that makes life good. Hear our intercessions for all sorts and conditions of men — and particularly those known to us who stand in special need. Hear our gratitude for him and deepen our devotion to his spirit, in whom we see life at its highest.

O GOD, WHO ART THE LIGHT of the minds that know thee, the life of the souls that love thee, and the strength of the thoughts that seek thee," we confess that our minds are often darkened, that our souls are the battle-ground of conflicting desires and wants, and that our desires are inconstant. Yet our hope is in thee, in thy mercy and forgiveness; and we trust, not our knowing of thee, but thy knowing of us.

The burden of work undone, neglected or half-done is upon us. The days of testing we dread are ahead; the promise of Christmas, only half-appropriated, is past; and the hope of Easter has not yet stirred. We are creatures of the past, and seekers of tomorrow, but so little persons of today and now. Yet, we bless thee for last night's rest and shelter; for the food of the morning; for the red of the dawn against the darkened sky; the light from a neighbor's window speaking a mother's care for her child; an old man's daily faithfulness. Break thou through our blindness and darkness of soul, awaken us to life's grandeur and its terror, its privileges and its dangers, and make us glad to be alive, faithful, and trustful before life's uncertainties.

We can neither forget the tangled skein of the world's life around us nor greet it with high hope. Arm us, O God, to endure what must be endured; give us the urgency of those who love, and the patience of those who are loved; the skill and the will to do the deed for peace and righteousness that may be within our power to do; yet keep us humbly aware of how often and how much we are part of the world's problems, and so little a part of their solution. In love thou didst create the world, and in thy love it is forever held: so we would live in it with gratitude and fidelity, by thy grace, in whose will is our peace and our freedom.

O God, who art greater than our greatest thought of thee, yet who art known in part in the experience of love and growth and the shared experience of great joy and sorrow, we bless thee for both the ordinary and the extraordinary moments of our lives, and for every new chapter of both our individual and common life.

We remember that the humble and the contrite heart is ever the most acceptable sacrifice. Give us such hearts, and with them teachable spirits, that we be not set in our own conceits, or stubborn in our ill-considered ways. Deliver us from evasiveness and self-defence, and grant us hearts and minds open to new insight however painful, knowing that the truth alone can make us free.

"Thou whose all-pervading eye, naught escapes without, within, pardon each infirmity, open-fault and secret sin." Mend thou the tattered sleeve of care, restore the seeing of the eye, the hearing of the ear, and speak to us where we are afraid or faithless.

To thine everlasting mercy we commend the traveler on his way, those who know the torment of pain, those who walk a path overshadowed by approaching death, those who live with blighted hopes, those who know the remorse and back-bite of wrong-doing.

To those who exercise the authority of government, grant a strong sense of fidelity to public trust and deliverance from an undue preoccupation with public favor and public criticism. To us who are followers, grant some touch of generosity and magnanimity, the will to do well the work which is ours to do, and to do our share and more, of the tasks of our common life.

O God of hope, touch us with hope.

O God of joy and laughter, touch us with joy and laughter.

O God of compassion, touch us with compassion for the sorrows of others.

O God of growth make us spiritually more adequate for anything that experience may bring us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

GREAT IS THE NEED and deep is the hunger which brings us to this hour. Great is our need and deeper is the hunger for a central affirmation and identification around which all lesser affirmations and identifications fall in place; for some point of orientation toward which our souls may swing as the needle of the compass swings to the north. So we turn toward thee who are the creator of life, and the source of its re-making.

In thy presence we know the poverty of our inmost lives; in thy presence we realize how far apart are our habitual deeds and our occasional aspirations. In thy presence we sense how easily big words roll from our lips and find so small a place in our lives. Thy mercy, Lord, we need and seek.

Come to us along all the paths we walk. Be thou within our laughter and our weeping, on the boundary of our joy and of our sorrow. Be thou in both the summer and the winter of our experience and whether the way leads uphill or down. Arm us for the days of testing with an inner quiet and strength, and in the days of ease save us from complacency.

We pray for all sorts and conditions of men — those for whom the horizons are far and wide and those for whom they are near and narrow. For those who struggle against great odds, for those whose lives seem bound by circumstances not of their own choosing, for those who live with regret and remorse, be present Lord, to bless, uphold and inspire. And touch the time in which we live, not only with thy judgment but with hope and promise, that we who live it may see clearly and do firmly the thing thou callest us to do.

*O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while life shall last,
And our eternal home.*

O THOU, WHO ALONE CAN RIGHTLY JUDGE and altogether love, our wants are many but our needs are few. And no need is deeper than our need to be known by thee, and in that knowing, to know ourselves.

Each of us looks out from a point where life is fraught with uncertainty, each of us struggles with some unsolved problem, each of us confronts some fear, and each of us stands on the boundary between growth and decay. As we bow in thy presence, we seek no flashing insight, no prophet ecstasy, but we seek first to be unevasive, and then some quiet illumination, a sense of a love that never fails and a light that never goes out.

Keep us steady and true in hard as well as easy times. Keep us from undue pessimism and false optimism. Break through the weight of care and dullness of soul with some chance-remembered line of poetry, the remembered face of a sleeping child, a moment of worship and adoration. Break through the insulation by which we have shut out the world's pain and sin and our own involvement in its injustice and evil, and confront us again with both the compassion and judgment of Christ.

O Thou, who art present whenever two or three are gathered together in thy name, bless, we beseech thee, far-scattered brethren in cathedral, temple and simple meeting-house, across this land and across the world. Grant to all who gather in worship some power to awaken each other to mutual helpfulness and forgiving acceptance. Grant us to know amidst the weight of care and the sadness of hurrying days, an immortal gladness, that amidst the striving of time, we may know a peace which transcends time and passeth understanding.

GREAT ART THOU, O God, and greatly to be praised! Thou hast created the heavens, the earth, and all that dwell therein. Thou art our creator and the father of our spirits, but we are far from thee in our hearts, and our lips are unworthy to praise thee as thou shouldst be praised. Yet we make bold to worship thee, whose mercy is so great that thou demandest of us not the achievement of goodness but a humble and a contrite heart.

Thou art the living God. Thou livest in the order and mystery of nature, in the healing of the body, in the hunger of human life to grow, and in the thrust in each one of us for meaning and wholeness, however blocked, distracted, and incomplete that thrust may be. But most of all, thou livest in love and especially in him whom we call Lord and Master. In him we see the strength of gentleness and the ruinous tragedy of brute force; in him we see the regal greatness of purity and compassion which alone can melt our hard hearts. So we would lift him up and be ourselves lifted up, by his claim upon us "against whatever darkness."

Into thy presence we bring our own needs and the needs of others, those we name in love before thee and those unknown whose need is deep. We confess before thee our need of interior cleansing, an inner quiet and peace, but we need thy judgment too. We seek a deep renewal but we know it cannot come without pain and suffering. We need forgiveness but we know it is somehow inseparable from our ability to give as well as receive.

O God, who knoweth our needs better than we know them, and who knoweth us better than we know ourselves, speak to us where we are, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

O THOU, WHO AT THE BEGINNING, brooded over the earth when it was without form and void, and said "let there be light," brood thou over us in congregation and touch us with both light and healing.

O Thou, who are the beyond that is within, in whom is hid the secret of our existence, we are both thy creatures and rebels against thee, and we come with the marks of both upon us. As fleeting clouds dot the countryside, now with sunshine, and now with shadow, so our lives are intermittent light and darkness. We know both quiet glory and quiet desperation. Take the discordant notes of our lives and blend them together, if only for a brief moment.

Grant us, O Lord, amidst the busyness of life some sense of wonder and interior calm, some capacity to know again life's mystery, the height and depth of existence, some capacity to rejoice in it and know its sorrow, yet amidst its vicissitudes to know the call of Christ and to find in him both center and circumference.

Keep us, O God, in openness to the distant horizons, yet aware of and faithful to the needs and duties of the day's routine. Through the clamor of our needs there riseth up the sight or recollection of those who struggle against difficulty, know defeat and discouragement. We remember those to whom our lives are joined in kinship, and those whose love has blessed us. We would commit to thee the network of loyalties and responsibilities in which we stand and seek in things large and small, thy guidance and thy judgment, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

WE LIMIT NOT THY TRUTH, O God, to our poor reach of mind, for thou art great beyond our knowing and greater than our greatest thought of thee. Yet we apprehend thee from afar — in both the awe and beauty of nature; in the wonder of music, in the love that seeketh not its own — and the danger of our sin sometimes brings us closer to thee than the safety of our virtue.

Yet awe and beauty are not all we know. We give thee thanks for the simple kindness of those who smooth the jars and irritations of our distracted lives, for those who, amidst the world's discontents, are glad to be alive and make us glad; for the delight of a good meal, a good book, the laughter of little children, the good cheer of old age, and those whose faith and hope are unbroken by the world's woe.

We are troubled by our privileged position, the inequalities between men, the gap between good and ill health, sorrow and joy. In our good fortune make us grateful and generous; in our poor fortune make us courageous and open to the hidden graces to be found in darkness. And whether we abound or are debased make us to know that nothing can separate us from thee but our own betrayal.

O GOD, WHOM THE HEAVENS cannot contain, nor the human mind encompass, yet whom our hearts need and seek: we bless thee because, before we ever seek thee, thou has first sought us.

Out of the week we come, knowing again both joy and sorrow, victory and defeat, a mixed harvest of good and evil. We seek thy peace but we need first thy forgiveness and thy miracle whereby we, who are unacceptable even to ourselves, are yet accepted by thee.

Heal us of the haste and distractions which unravel our souls, come to us where we are afraid and anxious. Illumine the darkness in which we dwell – the darkness we do not know and that which we consciously choose.

Hear again our gratitude for food and shelter, the measure of health that is ours, our share of morning and of night, of warmth and cold, the remembrance of autumn and the hope of spring, the love we are given to know, our sins forgiven and our shame unpublished, and for him who was the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief who, yet for the joy that was in him, set his face to go to Jerusalem.

And we forget not the bundle of life in which we are tied in family and home, in school and college, in community and nation, and with those we love who stand under special threat. Keep us in quiet faithfulness to holiest vows and simplest duties. Keep from discouragement all who resist the powers of evil, and those who seek to move the public conscience. And wherever life is buffeted, tested and tried, do thou, O Lord, speak the word most needed to be heard.

O THOU, WHO ART FROM EVERLASTING to everlasting, in whom there is no variableness, neither shadow that is cast by turning; we, who are children of sense and time, yet whose imaginations transcend the limits of time and space, lift up our hearts to thee who art the lord and giver of life, and lord of all the worlds that are or ever will be.

As the earth is being awakened even beneath the crust of snow, we would that the winter of our discontent were past. As thou workest beneath the surface of the earth, do thou work within the crusted habits of our sin and weakness, that light may dispel darkness, hope disillusionment, goodwill violence, and openness overcome our defensive fears; that thy word may call us to walk whatever path opens before us, in faith and hope.

Take, O Lord, our largest and longest hopes and our most immediate duties, and shape them into an effective discipleship. Deepen us down, past all thin securities and easy optimisms, past despair, to the faith that "neither life nor death, nor any other creature" can separate us from thy love. Let thy blessing rest especially on all those for whom the joy of this day is filtered through some extraordinary sorrows and special circumstances. Touch, O God, the time of each of us with thine own timelessness, our insufficiency with thy sufficiency, and our need with thy grace: for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever.

ETERNAL GOD, WHOSE MERCY is higher than the heavens, wider than the sea, and deeper than our sin, hear us as in quietness and faith we pray to thee and call thy name in hope and need. We come out of the week, some of us with burdens we would leave here and bear the promised song away, some with burdens we must learn to bear and need thy grace and help to carry well, some with sorrows that embitter and sins that scar, and not one of us, O Lord, untouched by the tempter's power. Touch us now with thy healing presence, clear our inward vision, that we may see through the false shows of life and be kept quiet and true by the great realities.

We praise and bless thee, Lord, for thy faithfulness, written large in renewing green and bursting bud. Thou hast remembered again the covenant of the rainbow made in ancient days with us and bird and beast and every creeping thing, both large and small. Thy promise is fulfilled: the seedtime is at hand; the winter is swallowed up; o'er moor and fen, yea, crag and torrent, comes back the spring. The poorest flower thou hast not forsaken. With equal power thou renewest the poor things of earth even as the rare and rich. Holy is thy name, sufficient is thy power — bring thou spring to our lives as well.

O Thou, before whom the generations come and go, in whose love are held both the living and the dead, we commit to thee those whom we love — our changing fortunes of life and death. O Thou whom the past hath not wearied and the future maketh not afraid, who keepeth not only Israel but the eternal destinies of men, help us to remember what ought to be remembered and to forget what ought to be forgotten, that this day's joys and opportunities may be received and enjoyed. Give us the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness and the oil of faith for the lamps of love.

Hear thou, O Lord, not only these spoken prayers, but the silent prayers we make now, each one to thee.

O THOU, WHO ART THE GOD of all the ends of the earth and the father of all the families of men, who moveth not only through and above the centuries, but in each new blade of grass; from a storm-swept world and from the turmoil of our own inner lives, we turn to thee who alone canst rightly judge and altogether love.

We confess that we have trusted too much in the devices and desires of our own hearts. We confess that we live in a time when men trust too much their own devices, and too little seek the way of justice. We confess, too, that we have trusted too much the outward appearance, and that we have taken our privileges and gifts, not as trusts to be used as good stewards, but as the basis for the claim of further privilege and reward. We have sought, not truth but ease, cleverness rather than realness, and we acknowledge that before thee, there is little health in us.

But turn us, O Lord, from our sorry ways. Call the nations back from their trust in brute force; turn our hearts toward the light and enable us to walk the way of Christ in the world in which we live.

Hear our simple thanks for the bursting bud, each waiting leaf, the new green of the grass, for every kindly deed and for every faithful heart. Grant, Lord, that as we scan the distant scene, we fail not the duty at our workshop door, nor scorn the small concern because the larger cannot be done. Lead us this day, from fitful faith, from half-heartedness, from reluctant loyalties, to a glad obedience to, and acceptance of, the discipline that our aspirations necessitate; and to the acceptance of the trials and dangers that growth always brings.

O GOD, WHO ART SO GREAT that our thoughts touch only the edges of thy being, and our imaginations are but partial pictures of thy truth, we dare to come before thee in faith because, while we by searching cannot find thee out, thou hast already sought and found us.

Come to us by all the paths we walk — the bright, bold path of adventure and wide horizons; the path of common want and habit; the uphill path of toil and struggle; the shadowed path of disappointment and regret. Break thou through both our complacency and our anxiety, our lack of wonder and our dullness of soul; awaken us to our privilege and our need, our opportunity and our peril; and in forgetfulness of self may we praise thee unto wholeness of life.

Search out the hidden sin and the presumptuous fault; touch with healing and with hope our secret sorrows. Amend what we are and direct what we shall be. Give us to discern the path which leads to life from the path that leads to death, the right from the expedient; and in things large and small give us to respond to that which spells freedom rather than repression, human enlargement rather than impoverishment; and may no darkness or hardness in the world about us, be an excuse for our own disloyalty.

*God of grace and God of glory
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage,
That we fail not man or thee.*

O THOU, BY WHOSE PROVIDENCE all the worlds that are were called into being, by whose power and goodness life is sustained, by whose mercy we are forgiven and in whose will is our freedom, thou art so great that we cannot comprehend, yet thou art so deep within us that we cannot escape thee.

Thou hast set us to live not only between summer and winter, day and night, life and death, but between grandeur and wretchedness, love and hate, victory and defeat, loyalty and disloyalty, and we know ourselves to be children of both. But call us back, O Lord, call us back from the ways of death and darkness, from our pettiness and our evil, from our blindness and our pride, and by thy mercies, large and small, by thy laughter and thy agonizing forgiveness, set our feet and our paths toward the light and lead us as we should go.

Yet we remember with gratitude the simple joys of life, the boon of health, the medicine of love and friendship, the generosity of those who seek more to understand than to be understood, to think the best rather than the worst. We bless thee for the sight of stars at night, the sight and smell of growing things, for every act of human courage and goodness.

And we forget not turmoil of the world nor the sorrows and trials of our friends. Strengthen every force for good, for peace, for justice. Keep from discouragement those who struggle against great odds, and sustain those in their faithfulness who may grow weary in well-doing.

O GOD, WHOM WE SEEK, sometimes in joy, sometimes in sorrow, and sometimes in dull grayness, we seek thee now because thou alone canst hold together love and judgment, mercy and correction.

"Give us not to think of things so far away as the uncertain harvest"; keep us in the springtime of the year; yet when summer comes, and autumn, nudge us on — not too quickly or reluctantly — but make us glad to live in each stage as it comes.

Of old thou didst promise that as long as seedtime and harvest remain, thou wouldst not destroy the world, and in the sky thou didst set the rainbow as a sign and seal. And what thou didst promise not to do, we believe thou wilt not permit thy creatures to do. So place a rainbow of promise and hope in our hearts!

We pray not for escape from the circumstances amidst which we live, but for the grace and wisdom to change what can be changed, for the strength to endure what cannot be changed, the wit to know the one from the other, and for the grace to hold whatever lot is ours and to lift it up before thee, until it blesses us.

Unto thee we commend not only ourselves, but each other, and those known to us who stand in special need. We commend unto thee our President, all who share the responsibility of government with him, the leaders of all the nations, that together we may find the path that leads towards peace, justice, and freedom. Make stout the hearts and increase the patience of those who suffer on the growing edges of an enlarging conscience.

At the point of our need, do thou come to us, and at that point may the spirit of Christ possess us. Amen.

THE HEAVENS DECLARE THY GLORY, O God, and the firmament showeth thy handiwork: science and art, music and religion are but man's response to thy leading. Before the wonders of thy hand we can only stand in awe. Fill our hearts with thy praise in the daytime, and at night may the company of our thoughts bow and worship thee.

As we come to this place — for some of us old and familiar yet ever new and for some of us new, yet with timeless intimations — we bless thee not only for this sacred place but for all places where we have bowed in prayer and arose in strength to walk in faith and hope. O Thou in whom there is no near or far, no then or now, no alien race, no foreign shore, hover over us in congregation, cleansing us from what is low and unworthy, restoring us to our rightful minds, reminding us of who and what we are.

Hearten us, O God, with the knowledge that only half the road we travel is a lonely, pilgrim road, and that the other half has been traveled by seekers in every age. Let us hear the footsteps of those who have gone before us; those who come after us and of those who accompany us. Before each turn in the road and each new doorway of experience make us unafraid, eager for the morrow's joys and events, resourceful and flexible enough by thy grace to turn its difficulties into opportunities and its obstacles into stepping stones.

Hear us as we pray for those to whom we are most closely joined in the bundle of life; for the homes from which we have come; for those for whom life is especially hard. Touch with strength each heart here bowed; heal each spirit bruised and hurt, and set thou our feet on the path that leads to light and life. Amen.

ETERNAL GOD, BY WHOSE WILL we are here and amidst whose mystery we live, we the children of sense and time lift up our hearts unto thee who art from everlasting to everlasting.

Thou art forever seeking entrance into human hearts. Thou comest not in the thunderings from the mountain-heights, but in the cry of the world's discontent and the anguish of the oppressed we hear the echo of thine own judgment. Thou comest to us in the still small voice of conscience which thou hast written on our inward parts; thou comest in the appeal of beauty and the call of duty. In the world about us that thou hast made, we see an orderliness and a meaning which is the work of thy hand and the expression of thy purposes. But we knew thee first in the love of those who sought not their own, a love which was patient and kind, forgiving and long-suffering; a love that bore all things, believed all things, hoped all things and endured more than we could ask or think. And through the growth of a little child and the opportunity to guide that growth we hear a call to be gentle, wise, self-controlled and worthy of another's trust. In these we hear thy voice, yet thou art more than these.

In thy presence we see ourselves as we are, inconstant of spirit, devious of purpose and double of heart. Forgive the unlit lamp, the ungirded loin, the wasted hour, the buried talent, and all the unsweetened habits of our daily lives. We bless thee for our sins forgiven or prevented and our shame unpublished.

In thy presence we would see ourselves as we might be: strong through righteousness, clean through purity, sure through faith, unafraid of the light and unafraid of the darkness.

Let the light and warmth of thy righteousness and love fall upon the dark places of our world and of our hearts, and renew a right spirit within us and within all men.

AS SOUND OF TOLLING BELL falls on the morning air we gather together, prompted by an immemorial wistfulness born of personal need and loyalty to our human kind. Once more thou hast said, "let there be light," and once more we bow together in the ancient, adoring habit of our race, glad for the occasion and grateful for the privilege.

When we stand before the great mysteries of life, contrition and gratitude mingle in our hearts. We see the contradictions of the world in which we live and know that they are compounded of the contradictions of our own hearts. Yet we sense a not-always-hidden glory in this world and we know it is thy world and that something deep within our nature responds at times to thee.

Reveal, O Lord, and overcome our unconscious pride, the undetected sin, the unseen error that enters into even the best we think and do and say. Yet make splendid and commanding the vision of what we yet may be and what thou dost purpose for us and for thy world.

But lest the distant vision make us neglectful of our nearer duties, enable us to see clearly and to decide wisely those issues which the hours and the days bring to us. Enable us to sense and discern, even in imperfect achievement, the broken aims and the unworthy purposes of our lives, the things that cannot be shaken and the truth which abides, that to them we may give bold faith, clear hope and glad obedience.

How shall we utter unto thee our gratitude for those things which, even amidst cloudiness of soul and anxiety of mind, still prompt in us a cry of joy. How shall we utter our heartfelt prayer for some happy issue out of the world's misery. How shall we sound our need for light and truth and strength and forgiveness which thou alone canst give.

Hear, O Lord, our spoken prayers; hear still more the prayers we make now in silence unto thee.

O THOU, WHO ART BEYOND US yet within us, the truth beyond our truth, the light above our light, we cannot by searching find thee out. The mind may honorably seek thee but thou canst best be addressed from our knees in prayer, with a cry from the creature to his creator. So we make bold to say, "Our Father," "Our God" — "our help in ages past; our hope for years to come."

These are days of sacrament — the sacrament of flowering bush, of singing bird, of wedding bell and marching feet, of broken bread and wine of joy. But we hear the tolling of another bell and know that hearts bow low with sorrow and regret. "What to make of a diminished thing" tries and searches the heart as much as commencing and beginning. All our varying and varied lot we would lift up to thee and pray for the grace to hold it till it blesses us and turns our hearts to thee.

Hear again our simple cry of gratitude; accept our penitence for the missing of the mark, forgive our sin, and retrace thy image in our inward parts. Take the memories and the hope which this day inspires and make this an act of renewed discipleship to him who is the way, the truth and the life, ever Jesus Christ our Lord.

O GOD, WHO WAST AND ART, and art to come, God of all the worlds there are or ever will be, God not only of the rolling spheres but father of our spirits and the still, small voice that speaks to us in our best moments, once more we seek thee in adoration and in praise, in humble thanksgiving and in simple need.

Again gratitude and contrition mingle in our hearts: gratitude for all that makes life good, — the unending miracle of night and day, rest and work, the domestic affections that sweeten and enliven life, for work to do and the occasional skill to do it well, for the coming of new ideas and experiences, for the beauty of form and sound, for that which calls us to struggle and that which brings us peace.

Yet we see the evils of the world in which we live and we know the waywardness of our own hearts and the duplicity of our own desires. We know that we use the evil of the world as an excuse for our weakness and the darkness of the world as a cover for our misdeeds. We would see the stark brutality of our world and not be overwhelmed by it; we would see ourselves for what we are and yet by thy grace sense and accept the potentialities which thou hast placed in every one of us. Turn, O Lord, our gratitude into consecration and our contrition into effective repentance.

As we bow in prayer our minds go out to all to whom we are joined by bonds visible and invisible, strong and slender. We remember other sacred places in countryside and small village, in large cities, across this land and in other lands, where men and women gather to worship thee. Grant to all who seek thee the thing most needful: to those who walk in darkness, some light upon their way; to those who go in loneliness and grief, some sense of a divine companionship; to those who kneel in fear, the strength to stand in faith; and to all of us Christ's own welcome to both life and death, the easy and the difficult. In his name we pray.

O THOU, WHO ART FOREVER UNDEFEATED by the past, forever unexhausted by the present, and who dost ever set before us open doors, visit us now and in this place with thy blessing and thy benediction.

We give thee thanks for the achievement which these days represent: the disciples accepted, the testing met, the purpose fulfilled. We bless thee for "Ten thousand strong" in every place, on every shore, and the brave history in which we stand. For the sacrifices made on our behalf, for the inheritance made possible by the struggles of others, we are grateful, but these alone cannot make us safe or secure. Through the privilege and the perils, the opportunities and the crises with which life is always fraught, do thou guide us, O Lord, for unless thou canst accept and bless the efforts of our lives, then we live blindly and in vain.

We lift to thee the pathos of the movement of life from generation unto generation, and the ambiguity of the movement from age to age and from time to time. Both our lives and our time are touched with mortal incompleteness.

Grant that out of our much speaking and listening, writing and reading, the heart of this people may be wise, its mind sound and its will righteous. The eye and the ear are poor witnesses, and the mind a poor instrument, if the heart be barbarous! Create in us the civil heart, the humane spirit, the dedicated mind, that in our time we may seek and serve the truth which redeems and sets us free.

To thee we commit the path already traveled, the untrod path before us. The Lord bless us and keep us, The Lord make his face to shine upon us, and be gracious unto us!

ALMIGHTY GOD, WHO HAS BROUGHT AGAIN into being another day, and renewed unto us the gift of life, hear and receive us as we gather together in common worship, to praise thy name and to give thee thanks, and to lift up before thee our lives together and as individuals.

We bless thee for the ordinary mercies of this day, for food and shelter, rest and protection, for the affections and love which surround us and hold life together. We bless thee too for the extraordinary mercies, the coming home, the going forth, for chapters ending and chapters begun. Amidst life's strange mixtures of the old and the new, the familiar and the strange, grant us the grace to stand open to thy leading and to the breaking in of new truth. Deliver us from coldness and hardness of heart, from the unseeing eye, and unhearing ear, and from all the subtle ways we may betray the spirit of life.

Grant to us the mercy of thy forgiveness; make us open to thy judgment, and guide us into the way we should go. Touch with healing the hurt and sore places of our lives, illumine the dark and forbidding places, and if there be places of resistance to thee and the truth we know but do not follow, break thou through.

We remember in both love and concern the community and nation of which we are a part, and pray for their welfare, and thy blessing upon all who lead and all who follow. Hear too our prayer, O Lord, for the Christian community in all places, that the church may be the church in something of the fullness of the Christian gospel, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

ALMIGHTY GOD, CREATOR AND SUSTAINER of the world and all that dwell therein, master craftsman who worketh with moon and stars and mountains and lakes, who breatheth into us the breath of life, whose creative word spoke at the beginning, and especially in Christ, receive, we beseech thee, the adoration of our hearts, retrace thy image in us, call us back from destruction and every evil way and renew a right spirit within us.

For the ordinary and extraordinary mercies of our daily lives, we give thee thanks. Forbid that we should receive so much and be so little aware of it. Forbid that we should take the gifts of life, of health, and safety and sense not either their goodness or their precariousness. And for the daily affections that sweeten life, the medicine of love which mends and heals our hearts, and the friendship that inspires us, hear our grateful thanks.

But hear too, O God, our cry of penitence. Forgive us that we are so unresponsive in spirit, so blind of mind and dull of heart, so self-preoccupied, so quick to receive and so slow to give, and so quick to hurt and destroy the things we cherish most.

Guide with wisdom those to whom the power of government has been given. Give patience and perseverance to those who struggle on the frontiers of our twisted human relationships to win a larger measure of freedom and peace. Sustain the victims of oppression and injustice and win from each of us, where we live and labor, a growing devotion to the common good.

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